

Agyptian Archaeology.



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THE · PRE-COLUMBIAN VOYAGES · OF · THE WELSH · TO · AMERICA.

Antiquities or Remnants of History, are, as said, *Tanquon Taiala naufraga*, like planks of a shipwreck, when industrious persons, by an exact and scrupulous diligence and observation, out of monuments, names, words, proverbs, traditions, private records and evidences, fragments of stones, passages of books that concern not story, and the like, do save and recover somewhat from the deluge of time.— *Advancement of Learning*.

BY B. F. DE COSTA.



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TO THE MEMBERS
OF
Saint David's Society,
NEW YORK CITY,

WHOSE ANCESTORS SAILED UPON THE WESTERN OCEAN,
FOLLOWING CLOSE IN THE TRACK OF THE NORTHMEN,
AND LONG PRECEDING THE
EARLIEST NAVIGATORS OF ENGLAND, PORTUGAL AND SPAIN,
AND WHOSE MORE IMMEDIATE PROGENITORS
PERFORMED SO LARGE A PART,
BOTH AS STATESMEN AND SOLDIERS,
IN LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC,
WHICH, BY THEIR PATRIOTIC ENDEAVORS
AND WISE DEVOTION
TO MORAL, EDUCATIONAL AND RELIGIOUS INTERESTS,
THEY ARE NOW DOING SO MUCH TO PERPETUATE,
THIS VERY INSUFFICIENT ESSAY
ON THE PRE-COLUMBIAN VOYAGES OF THE WELSH

IS

Respectfully Dedicated.



THE PRE-COLUMBIAN VOYAGES OF THE WELSH TO AMERICA.

THE alleged voyages to America by the Welsh, set down near the year 1170, form a subject that has never received the attention to which it is entitled by American writers, while in Great Britain it has not been treated with anything like justice. No monograph of a really meritorious or exhaustive character has ever been devoted to this important theme either in Europe or America. Superficial sketches are certainly not wanting, while the alleged voyage has often been referred to in historical and general works, and the probabilities of the case have sometimes been discussed. Comparatively little historical criticism, however, has been applied to the voyage of Madoc, son of the Prince of Wales, while, as if by some kind of an understanding, the most of that class of writers who, with good reason, might have been expected to have studied the subject with care, have either ignored the voyage, or contented themselves with a few irrelevant remarks which serve to show that, in reality, they were unacquainted with the merits of the case.

Justice requires us to point out that one cause of this neglect may be found in the fact that the discussion with regard to the voyages of the Northmen to America, which began with the opening of the eleventh century, had the prior claim to notice, being superior both in interest and importance, and quite overshadowing the modest claim of the Welsh. The Northmen, for more than half a century last past, have largely monopolized the attention of many inquirers concerning the Pre-Columbian History of America. On the other hand, injudicious advocates of the Welsh have done much to create prejudice and distrust. It is not improbable, too, that Southey, by his poem of "Madoc," did considerable to convey the impression that the subject was really a theme quite removed from the sphere of veritable history.

The present, however, would appear to be a favorable time for the reopening of the discussion, since the voyages of the Northmen are now substantially accepted, and the Sagas are received as genuine histories. Indeed there should never have been any doubt on this point. Critics like Alexander Von Humboldt did not doubt, even at the outset. That great investigator frankly accepted the records, and was of opinion that the scene of the Northmen's exploits was to be found on the coast of New England. George Bancroft, on the contrary, taught for about half a century, in the various edition of his History of the United States, that the Icelandic records were "mythological in form and obscure in meaning," but in the edition of his work published in 1883, he dropped all reference to the subject, and has since had the frankness to admit that, in taking that view of the subject, he fell into error. The conviction of the great proportion of students, especially in Europe, is now so clear and decided with regard to the reality of these voyages and the historical character of the narratives, that few persons will be likely to concern themselves much in the future with regard to objections that may be urged. The way, therefore, is now open for the discussion of the claims of the Welsh, as Pre-Columbian voyagers to the shores of North America. One may come to this discussion with the more confidence, for the reason that old time prejudice is dying out, and that every year there are fewer to be found, who ask with the irony of Imogen :

" Prithee, think
There's livers out of Britain ? "

In opening this discussion, therefore, we may well quote some observations by Humboldt, who, speaking of the "obscurity which still shrouds the voyage of the Gaelic Chief Madoc," to "a Western Land, 1170," observes :

"It is much to be desired that, in our days, when a sound and severe spirit of criticism, devoid of a character of contempt, prevails, the old investigations of Powell and Richard Hakluyt might be resumed in England and Ireland." Continuing, he says, "I do not participate in the rejecting spirit which has, but too often, thrown popular tradition into obscurity, but I am, on the contrary, firmly persuaded that, by a greater diligence and perseverance, many of the historical problems which relate to the maritime expeditions of the early part of the middle ages * * * will one day be cleared by the discovery of facts with which we have hitherto been entirely unacquainted."

Let us now proceed to inquire upon what the claim of the Welsh to Pre-Columbian enterprise in America is founded? It will be noticed that we do not say, the Pre-Columbian Discovery of America. Unlike the Northmen, the ancient Welsh did not even claim the discovery of "New Lands." The discoveries of the Northmen formed a somewhat great surprise in Iceland and Scandinavia, but

they did not suppose for a moment that they had found a new Continent. On the contrary, they believed that the New Lands at the West formed an arm of Europe, stretching around the polar region from Norway to Greenland, extending thence indefinitely southward. Still they knew nothing of our land until Biarne, when sailing for Greenland, was blown upon the coast. The Welsh, on the contrary, did not exhibit surprise on reaching a land at the west. In fact, everything would seem to indicate that they knew of that land, probably by contact with the Northmen, and that Madoc sailed expecting to reach some part of the region known as Vinland. Ninety-five years before the voyage of Madoc, Adam of Bremen, after a visit to Denmark, wrote that "a region had been discovered by many in that [Western] Ocean, which was called Winland, because vines grow there spontaneously, making excellent wine; for that fruits, not planted, grow there of their own accord we know, not by false rumors, but by certain testimony of the Danes," which is in accord with the pleasant and fruitful countries reported by Madoc.

The proof upon which the voyages of Madoc to the New World rest, may be divided into two parts, taken respectively from Pre-Columbian and Post-Columbian sources. First, we give the Pre-Columbian statements taken from the Welsh Bards and Chroniclers, though it may be proper to preface our quotations with a few remarks concerning the ancient literature of the Welsh, which carries us back to a period before the Christian era.

With the introduction of Christianity into Wales, where the worship of Christ was established under an Episcopal Church government, long before the Roman missionaries turned their steps towards Great Britain, letters were cultivated and oral poetry and traditions were committed to writing, the Bards assuming a high position in the nation. These bards were not musical vagrants, roving, harp in hand, through the country side, singing songs for what they could pick up. The poet and the harpist formed separate offices, and while some poets were skilled in the use of this instrument, others were not, while many compositions were not adapted to musical expression. Besides, as fully recognized by scholars like Sharon Turner, the verses of the bards had other uses, being more or less of a historic character, and preserving important facts in British history. The poetry of the ancient Welsh did not possess the wonderful characteristics of Icelandic verse, nor did the Welsh cultivate prose in proportion to verse. Indeed, Icelanders were the first of all European people to produce a high style of original vernacular prose. The Welsh literature cannot take rank with the Icelandic, portions of which, as for instance the Eddas and the Heimskringla, will hold their high place like the productions of Homer and Herodotus, while literature endures. The Icelandic writings, too, have an advantage in their greater popularity, since the most serious efforts have been made to obscure the glory of Welsh literature, to

keep it in the background, and even destroy it, the Bards at one time being considered as politically dangerous. Hence it cost a severe effort to bring out that great collection of Welsh literature, "*Myvyrian Archaiology*," in three royal octavo volumes, forming an imperishable monument of Welsh industry and genius. Yet, notwithstanding the extent of this collection, taken together with a large quantity of unpublished material, it may truly be said that we now possess only a comparatively small portion of the ancient writings, many of which were destroyed by vandals, while fire and neglect have largely supplemented other destructive agents. The subject of Madoc must have engaged the attention of many poets and chroniclers, for it would be idle to suppose that the few scraps that remain are all that were ever written. Let us, however, turn to these surviving fragments and observe their bearing upon what later writers have laid down with respect to the Western voyages of the Welsh chief.

The first authority to be quoted is Lywarch ab Llwllyn, who flourished at the close of the thirteenth century. Speaking, evidently, of the two brothers, Hywal and Madoc, he says :

"Two princes of strong passions broke off in wrath,
The multitude of the earth did not love them;
One on land in Avron allaying ambition,
And another, a placid one, on the bosom of the vast ocean,
In trouble great and immeasurable,
Prowling after a possession easily guarded,
Estranged from every one for a country."

This translation, from Stephens's "*Literature of the Cymry*" (II. §2), is accepted as literal, and, like the rest of his translations, it is considered by judges entirely reliable, conveying both the letter and the spirit of the text. The original is found in "*Myvyrian Archaiology*" (I. 283).

We have here the picture of a sea rover, whose story was well known by the people, who would at once recognize its faithfulness; while the incidental character of the reference renders it all the more valuable. The same Bard makes an additional allusion to Madoc, where, speaking of the latter's brother Iorworth, he says that Iorworth met the Saxons by Llanwynwry's Lake, and describes him as

"Nephew of Madoc, whom we more and more
Lament that he is gone——."

That "Madoc disappeared from his native country," Stephens, a hostile and able critic, frankly admits as "proved beyond a doubt." This appears, he says, from the poem of "The Hot Iron," which gives an account of the trial of one who was accused of having murdered the sea rover. The accused says :

"Good iron! exonerate me
From the charge of having slain Madoc,
And show that he who slew the fair Prince
Shall have no part of heaven." *Myr. Archaiol.* I. 289.

Madoc son of Gwynedd is not to be confounded with that Madoc who, in 1180, was slain by Thomas, his drunken brother.

A later Bard, Meredydd ab Rhys, who wrote about two years 1440, also shows distinctly that Madoc was a sea rover.

"Madoc am I who through my life
By sea will seek my wealth and prey."

In the 1583 edition of Hakluyt's *Voyages* there are found some ancient lines which, the author says, "I received of my learned friend Mr. William Camden." The English version runs:

"Madoc I am the sonne of Owen Gwynedd.
With stature large and comely grace adorne
No land at home, nor store of wealth me please,
My mind was whole to search the ocean sea."

Camden evidently drew the lines from Rhys. At the period when the latter wrote, the accused man had been exonerated from the murder of Madoc, and it was concluded that the adventurer had lost his life on the sea, which may have been the case, as we do not know the result of his last western voyage. The poet, Cynddelw, who lived about the time of Llywelen, wrote:

"And is not Madoc by the whelming wave
Slain? How I sorrow for the helpful friend!—
Even in battle he was free from hate,
Yet not in vain grasped he the warrior's spear."

But now, whither did Madoc sail, and what land beyond the sea did he make the scene of enterprise? In partial reply we may quote the Pre-Columbian Genealogies compiled by Ievan Breeca, which say that "Madoc and Riryd found land far in the west and settled there." William Owen, in the "*Cambrian Biography*" (p. 233), says that the expedition is recorded in a book of pedigrees by Breeca, written about the year 1466. This is supported by Guttyn Owain, a distinguished poet and genealogist who wrote between 1460 and 1490.

But we must quote here from the ancient Triad of the "*Three Disappearances*," found in "*Cambro-Briton*" (Vol. I. 1820, p. 123), which makes the third remarkable Disappearance, that of "Madawg, son of Owain Gwynedd, who, accompanied by three hundred men, went to sea in ten ships, and it is not known to what place they went."

We should not hesitate to consider such testimonies, because they are associated with some things that are marvellous. Discrimination must be used. The essential fact given in the Triad is, that Madoc went to sea with ten ships. The writer did not know the exact destination of the fleet. The point he makes is, that the disappearance of Madoc and his fleet was a remarkable occurrence. This is all that he wanted to convey. He was not writing to convince anyone that an enterprise was undertaken. He had no interest in showing that the Welsh knew of a great land in the West. The fact

was of no account at that period. He was simply writing a Triad. Madoc's well-known case formed one side of the triangle. We should simply try to put ourselves back in the age when the Triad was written, and feel its force as a testimony to the voyage of Madoc upon the Atlantic.

These testimonies are of more consequence than, possibly, they may appear at the outset. Carefully considered, it will be evident that they cover six important points :

1. That there was a well-known historic person named Madoc, the son of Gwynedd, Prince of Wales.
2. That he was a sailor, whose natural disposition drew him to adventures on the sea.
3. That this Madoc made westward voyages on the Atlantic.
4. That after the first voyage, upon which he embarked more or less secretly, he was supposed to have been murdered, while, on trial, the accused man was cleared.
5. That he reappeared in Wales, raised a company of three hundred men and women, embarking the company in ten ships, with the intention of returning to the site of his colony.
6. That he sailed westward for the purpose of founding a colony and never returned.

These are statements that antedate the voyage of Columbus, and come down to us from a period when discoveries on the Atlantic were viewed with general indifference by the Welsh, who found such matters of interest only in the incidental manner pointed out, while no glory was ever claimed in connection with Madoc's enterprise, the genealogist and poet being concerned only in the melancholy result. This is testimony of a kind that must inevitably have force with minds accustomed to weigh historic evidence.

We now turn to the Post-Columbian proof. First of all, we find Powell adding to our facts, and showing the course taken by Madoc on his first voyage, for he "left the coast of Ireland so far north that he came to a land unknown."* Powell gives as his authority (and his statements are accepted by Hakluyt) the Herald Bard, Guttyn Owain, who flourished, as we have seen, before Columbus. This statement attributed to Owain was first published in Post-Columbian times, but there is no sufficient reason for doubting that it was contained in some one of the many versions of his works, and was taken thence by Powell, as the latter declares.

Portions of the narrative given in the note† below are plainly unhis-

* The use of this word does not interfere with the belief that the Welsh knew of the voyages of the Northmen. Seventeenth century voyagers often spoke in this way of lands already discovered but not explored.

† Powell's narrative states, as one result of dissension in Wales, during the twelfth century, that Madoc, son of Owen Gwyneth, "left the land in contention betwixt his brethren and prepared certaine ships, with men and munition, and sought adventure by seas, sailing West, and leaving the coast of Ireland so farre North that he came to a land unknown, where he saw many strange things." "This Land," Powell illogically says, "must needs be some part of that countrey of which the Spaniards affirme themselves to be the first finders since Hanno's time. For by reason and order of Cosmographie, this land to which Madoc came, must needs be some parts of Nova Hispania, or Florida. Whereupon it is

torical. The intelligent reader will discover the error. It should be observed, however, that this particular narrative has been made the subject of numerous sketches, superficial articles, by writers incapable of perceiving what was required of a critic, and who, after despatching the Mexican allusions, have fondly regarded the claims of the Welsh as laid to rest. It will be necessary, however, to separate what is mere conjecture from what is supported by solid testimony, and especially that testimony which is drawn from ancient writings. The study of Mexican antiquities long ago persuaded the historical world that the use of the Cross had no necessary connection with Christianity. The forced interpretation of the facts by Powell grew out of the desire to antedate the Spanish claim to the New World. The struggle between England and Spain was coming on apace. The Armada was already foreshadowed, and men were ready for any pretext to urge against Spain. Powell, however, made a poor use of the facts, and would have done the Welsh a service if he had abstained from speculation, since, by false deductions, he prejudiced a large number of writers against the whole subject.

We have now to turn to another Post-Columbian writer. In 1634, Sir Thomas Herbert published, "*A Relation of Some yeares Travaille*," in which (p. 217) he gives additional particulars relating to the voyage of Madoc, saying that Madoc "put to sea from Abergwiley," that "after some weeks sailing due west he descried land, probably New Foundland; but whatever it was, it overjoyed him." He continues, "Madoc then ranged the coast . . . fixed on a spot to form his intended settlement. After he had stayed there awhile to recruit the health of his men, he fortified his settlement and left 120 there to protect it." Returning to Wales, he organized a second expedition and went back with his ten ships, and found "few of those whom he had left remaining," but, with the help of

manifest that that country was long before by Britaine discovered, more either Columbus or Ameriens Vesputius I than any Spaniards thither."

"Of the Voyage and returne of this Madoc," Powell says, "there may be fables mixed as the common people do use in distance of place and length of time, rather to augment than to diminish, but sure it is that he was there. And after he had returned home, and declared the pleasant and fruitful countreys that he had seen without blemishes, and upon the contrary put out what barren and wilde ground he had descried, he shewes in manifold one another, he prepared a number of shippes, and gat with him such men and women as were desirous to live in quietness, and taking leave of his friends to the last, journeyed thitherward again. Then for he is to be supposed that he and his people did build up those countreys, for so it appeareth by reasons before he shewes that in A. D. 1170, in sundry other places the people honored the crosse, which by him is to be understood as if Christians had bene there before the coming of the Christians. But considering how few were the many they followed the manners of the land they came unto, and used the language they found there. This Madoc, arriving in the western coast of America which he found in the yeare 1170, left most of his people there, and returned to his own country, acquaintance and friends to inhabit that faire and faire country, with their wives and children, as I find noted by Gu ten bergh. I am persuaded, with the aid of a little judgment, "that the land wherein the cause was then sown, some of the most fertile causes which make me to think so be these. 1. The countreys most fertile and fruitful in that country, which affirm that their rules descended from a king that came thither from a faire country, which theory is confessed by Montezuma, King of the country, in an oration made for quieting his people at his successors the King of Castile, Hernando Cortes being then present. . . . 2. The Earthy and fertile causes of the used in that country, etc."

his brothers Eneon and Edwal, put things once more in good order, and remained there some time, expecting the arrival of more of their countrymen . . . but they never came, and caused grievous disappointment," as the wars in Wales prevented further help. For authorities he refers to "Cynwric ab Grono, Meredydd ab Rhys, Guttain Owain, Lloyd, Howell, Prys [Rhys?], Hackluit, Broughton, Purchas, Davy and others."

On this it may be observed, first, that, in the time of Herbert, the interest in the subject of America had increased, and that, while this would tend to the amplification of facts, and the exercise of imagination, it would, at the same time, lead to inquiry among the Welsh for additional information. Herbert, indeed, produces an additional name, in the Pre-Columbian Bard, Cynwric ab Grono. Why, therefore, should not Sir Thomas be credited when he tells us that he found new matter respecting the voyage? It is a fact, that he had access to the finest and by far the most valuable collection of ancient Welsh manuscripts ever brought together, that of Rhaglan Castle, collected by his relation, the distinguished Earl of Pembroke. Why are not these ancient testimonies produced? In reply, it may be said that Rhaglan Castle, one of the first of British Castles, was destroyed during the Cromwellian Wars.

No one has yet produced any real reason for questioning the veracity of Sir Thomas Herbert, and the only course open to the average mind among the promiscuous eulogists of Columbus, who do not understand the real merits of the Genoese and are bitter against all Pre-Columbian adventurers on the high seas, is to employ the common, if not convincing argument, and to declare, in the terms of the unhistorical class to which they belong, that Sir Thomas Herbert falsified.

As it remains, however, no one has yet shown a shadow of a reason for questioning Herbert's veracity, though we may properly criticize the use he made of his material; for certainly Madoc sailed from Wales. That fact is indisputable, and he must have sailed from some port. That the name of the port lingered in tradition, being preserved in some one of the many Rhaglan manuscripts, is very likely, and it is not at all unlikely that Sir Thomas should discover that the name of the port was Abergwilly. At least he says so, and it is the business of the critic, in the absence of Sir Thomas himself, to prove that it is false, which cannot be done simply by *declaring* it false. That the Welsh adventurer should have built a fort in the land to which he sailed is not very remarkable. There were doubtless more things in the Rhaglan archives than are just now dreamt of in our histories, and doubtless the fuller story of Madoc's voyage was preserved there in chronicles, which, together with many precious historical treasures, perished by fire. Indeed the wholesale destruction of Welsh manuscript in many parts of Great Britain is simply deplorable. At one time for instance nearly

a hundred copies of the Chronicle of Caradoc existed in manuscript, but now nearly all have disappeared. This is not very surprising, however, when we consider the fact that no copy of the earliest editions of the New England *Primer* is known, though the book was one scattered abroad as thickly as the leaves in Vallambrosa. Under the circumstances, considering the indifference of the Welsh towards the early voyages, how poor would be the chance for the preservation of the story of Madoc. The possibility, nevertheless, is, that the class of partisan writers, who are unable to make the noble Columbus appear as great as they wish, will continue to reflect upon Sir Thomas Herbert, who was an upright man and a diligent student of the Welsh language and literature.

It is true that the voyage is not mentioned by Giraldus Cambrensis, who lived at the period of Madoc, but, like most writers of his class, he cared nothing about such subjects. It is also true, that the voyage is not mentioned in any copy of Guttyn Owain now accessible; but it is also a fact, that no two copies of these old narratives were alike, being furnished by the author at different periods, and for different persons and places, a book written out in old age being entirely different from the history of the same subject in early years. Whether Guttyn mentioned Madoc in one of his earlier or one of his later compositions, it is impossible to say, but the variety in the manuscripts is nevertheless pointed out and dwelt upon in "*Mgyrian Archæology*," though not with the slightest reference to the voyage of Madoc. Still the remarks of the learned editor apply, and throw light upon the fact, that the present version of Guttyn Owain is defective as respects Madoc. An illustration of these remarks will be had by comparing the last edition of Bancroft's "History" with that of half a century ago. Various voyages have disappeared, and new adventures appear in the place of the old; and when the early editions have actually been worn out, or have disappeared, as may actually prove to be the case and at no distant period, some one may take up a recent edition, and declare that Bancroft never wrote a word about the Northmen.

Here, for the present, at least, we rest the case, presenting the subject as one worthy of study and consideration, and one, moreover, that may richly reward the explorer of the unpublished ancient Welsh manuscripts that may still lie neglected in obscure niches among the mountains and in the seaport towns of beautiful Wales.

The subject, however, should not be left before we emphasize an important fact, namely, that, for the sake of the argument, the Post-Columbian authorities could be left out, since even then there would be solid ground for the probability of Madoc's voyage. This, however, would be unfair, alike to history and to Lloyd and Powell, as well as to Sir Thomas Herbert. These men were scholars of eminence and of high character. Their integrity has been impeached simply with sneers. Fair minded men, therefore, in the present stage of

the discussion, must give these writers due credit, and Herbert especially must be believed, when he says that he found in the old Chronicles, which were open to him at Rhaglan Castle, the fact that Madoc sailed west from Abergwilly and built a fort in the land beyond the sea, where he planted a colony. About all that can be said in reply, is that "Columbus discovered America," which is a statement that has had its day; while it is equally clear, that the real claims of Columbus, when understood, will require no disparagement of voyages made by earlier navigators.

NOTE.—The question relating to traces of a Welsh occupation, said to have been found among the American Indians, especially as set forth by Catlin, has been avoided purposely, requiring, as it does, a treatment that the Author cannot at present undertake. The Author's thanks are due to Mr. Henry Blackwell for the free use of his library, which contains some two thousand titles relating to the Welsh; also to Justin Winsor, LL.D., Harvard College Library.

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